



SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

A.A. General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

Winter 2018/2019

Let's open our meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the A.A. Preamble:

Alcoholics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."*

The Power of Forgiveness

"I am in a state penitentiary, and I want to start a meeting in the unit. The story I am sending you is about resentment.

When I was growing up, my father was either in prison or in active addiction. For my whole life, I hated him without realizing what that hate was doing to me. Since I got sober, I had to let go of that hate and forgive him. I'm in the middle of asking forgiveness from people I did wrong during my addiction. The following letter is from my journal.

'My Pops just came to see me, and I got answers to the questions I've lived with my whole life. Turns out my father and I are very similar — just as I always feared. But being able to look at the

world through his eyes changed my point of view. Repairing all of my relationships — through forgiveness and time — is the only remedy that can help me release these burdens. I've run on resentments all these years, not realizing the effect this had on relationships with loved ones I wasn't even angry at. Similar to addiction, my resentments prevented me from being the best version of myself. Growing up, I hated my father, and that hate seeped into my DNA. I was angry at the world, and, before I realized it, I'd become a mirror image of my father. It didn't take long for me to hate what I saw in that mirror. It consumed me so

completely that I've come to understand how I allowed myself to follow in his footsteps. Somewhere in the deep, dark basement of my soul, I wanted my father's approval. Though I'd never vocalized it, my actions spoke volumes. I strived to do what he did, but better. I experienced more fear and more violence. I didn't do this consciously, but I remember the day he told me he was hearing about my violent escapades in the streets: I was filled with a feeling of elation, like I'd earned the MVP in the NBA finals! Since being locked in a penitentiary cell, I have been grasping for pieces of debris from the shattered existence of my former life. But today, as I walked out of the visiting room after seeing him, I trailed behind my peers for a moment of private reflection. The smile that slowly spread across my face was contagious, and my eyes were quickly infected. This feeling was worth the million tears of anger,

abandonment and disappointment that dripped off the chin of my adolescent face. A few simple words in the span of a couple hours filled the hole I've had in my soul as long as I can remember. I love you, Pops, and I forgive you.'"

— Darris D., North West Region



Finding Hope

"My name is Jordan W., and as you can see by my stamped envelope, I'm incarcerated. I've earned myself a 28-month sentence. I'm scheduled to leave on Valentine's Day 2019. I've been working the Twelve Steps for about a year now. This week my sponsor told me to read 'A Vision for You,' and that's how I stumbled across this address I'm

writing to. I don't know exactly what I'm trying to accomplish by writing; I just read that A.A. would be glad to hear from me. I thought I'd write the Fellowship of A.A. to tell you that without you I would not be where I am today spiritually: A.A. has given me hope. A.A. makes me keep going, and it has brought me closer to God. I am thankful for the man I am today and the man I am continually growing to become. So, I just want to say thank you. I'm 25 years old. I can't wait to see what life will be like by the time I'm 50. Thank you again." — Jordan W., South East Region

*Copyright by AA Grapevine; reprinted with permission.

"My name is Miguel, and I want to thank you very much for your response to my letter and also for sending me the information I requested. It was very helpful. I am still incarcerated in Pennsylvania, but I am looking forward to being released in six months. I have been very active in my recovery with A.A. and also a recommended program they call a T.C. (therapeutic community), which has been very helpful and eye-opening. After my first DUI, I thought that phase in my life was over, but I didn't realize how easily I could relapse. Now, after two DUIs, two years in prison, and so much more hurt, negativity and loss, I have been more attentive and really taking my life seriously, in a healthy and positive way. For that I thank God, and I hope that I do get a third chance to move forward and to be successful in my future."

— Miguel L., South East Region

"We will see how our experience can benefit others..."

"I'd like the chance to give some of the women here the opportunity to see that, like me, they can use the principles and ideas found in A.A. to change their lives for the better. This past July, I celebrated my fourth year of sobriety, thanks to my God and this program. The principles behind A.A. and the people in it have not only helped to keep me sane and sober, but they've also made me into a better person in every aspect of my life. After a little less than a year of sobriety, I began to reach out in my community and help others. My sentence is currently 25 years to life. But I refuse to be disheartened. My God has a plan. I've been placed in an area with more alcoholics, addicts and unfortunate victims of circumstance per square mile than I ever could have reached on my own. These are the desperate cases. The inmate who has reached rock bottom and has nowhere to turn, looking for some

"The principles behind A.A. and the people in it have not only helped to keep me sane and sober, but they've also made me into a better person in every aspect of my life."

shred of hope. The inmate who has been in and out repeatedly, who has hardened herself to the experience because she thinks that this is just a fact of life; she doesn't know that there's a better way. The inmate who is afraid to leave because prison is safer than the streets she came from. The inmate who knows that she is going to use as soon as she reaches the other side of that gate; she doesn't want to, but she doesn't know how to stop. She knows she is going to die out there." — Danielle H., East Central Region

"Hi, I am Eric and I am an alcoholic. I have been sober for 35 days. I started drinking about six years ago, when I was 17. I am now 23. I got sick of drinking because I just got mad every time I got drunk. Now I have been going to A.A. and following my Higher Power — something I did not think I would ever do in my life — and I have seen that I let my girls down, as well as my girlfriend, my dad and my grandma. I know that when I get out

that I am going to talk to kids from up here, and I hope that I can stop them before it's too late for them." — Eric A.,

East Central Region

"My name is Justin H. I am 34 and I'm an alcoholic. I used to drink to be cool — to fit in and to impress people. Back then, drinking took my insecurities away, but it led me down a dark road that put me behind these walls. I thought that sobriety was insanity, and that my truly insane life was the way it should be! I had it all wrong, the Big Book tells me. Today, I know that sobriety is the way of life for me. How do I do it? One day at a time, with just a mustard seed of faith. We must remember that every long journey begins with one small step. What helps me stay sober one more day is faith, willpower, and pages 67 and 152 of the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Thank you to my A.A. family." — Justin H., Pacific Region

"Save Me from Myself"

"I know that I have a problem, and I am willing to do all that is in my power to save me from myself. This is my second time being incarcerated in this year alone. I have never tried the A.A. approach. I came into the system at the age of 21 and I am now 31. I lost all that I have owned three times now. But I still have my life! And I want to keep it that way. I desire to gain my family back and to be a part of my son's life." — Robert Y., North East Region

"I was 14 when I started drinking to get drunk. This continued until I reached 49. My longest and happiest period was 22 months of sobriety. But I lost that when I thought it was OK to work in a bar. I have done a lot of drugs, but I always started and ended with alcohol. I am desperate for a different life." — Kelly B., South East Region

Reaching out for Contact

"I am serving a 36-month sentence for a DUI and I would like another person in recovery to correspond with. I've been in the program on and off for many years, but I feel it now: at 35, I'm really serious about my recovery. I've never had a sponsor or worked the Steps with anyone other than myself. I read in an issue of Grapevine that I could write and have someone in the program to communicate with." — Melissa S., South East Region

"Hello, my name is Max. I am currently being held at a county facility. My controlling case is that of a DUI — my second one, to be exact. I guess that means I am an alcoholic, ha! I am currently being housed in a spot where we don't have a chance to go to meetings. I have many friends in the program with whom I've spoken, yet they are very busy and don't have a ton of time to write consistently. I was hoping to have some correspondence from a fellow A.A. while I am in here. I have a little less than eight months left on my sentence, and I have been in — and sober — for about 45 days, give or take. My sobriety date is August 28, 2018. I have seen this program save many, many lives — many of whom are good friends of mine. A new perspective plus a new insight on the program would be an amazing asset to my

empowerment in A.A. I want to be sober, one day at a time, so I too can give back what's been so freely given to me." —

Max B., Pacific Region

"In my drug treatment program I came across a newsletter of yours that interested me greatly. I've spent 23-plus years in and out of prison, but I didn't have much interest in any type of meetings when I was out in the community before this latest incarceration. I've found I appreciate freedom more, and I need to take my sobriety much more seriously. I've realized that I can't do this on my own. When I feel my weakest, I want to call on someone who knows what I'm going through, who won't judge me, and — most importantly — who respects me. I look forward to hopefully hearing back from your group." —

Earl B., North East Region

"I have enough humility and courage today to admit I can't fight my addiction alone. I know I am an alcoholic."

"My name is Jerrid C., and I'm an alcoholic — and I now understand what that means. I have enough humility and courage today to admit I can't fight my addiction alone. I know I am an alcoholic. I have been drinking since the age of 14, and now I am serving a 15-year sentence because of alcohol. Even here in prison I have my addiction, and I am still an alcoholic at the age of 30. I'm thankful for my brothers and sisters, who have courage enough to fight their addictions just like me. I'm also grateful that there are other alcoholics to help this young man fight his addiction to alcohol, and I thank each and every one of you. I know this fight will not be as easy as other fights. I decided to sober up through the Twelve Steps because I and my family have dealt with alcohol problems for many years. So I am glad — well, super glad — that I've taken the first Steps toward being sober. I honestly believe with all my heart that I can achieve sobriety through the Twelve Steps. I would love to correspond with an A.A. member who has a few years of being sober from alcohol. I believe having someone to encourage me — and me encouraging that man to stay sober — would be helpful for both of us. With lots of respect from this A.A. member." —

Jerrid C., South West Region

Making Living Amends

"My name is Samantha, and my sobriety date is January 14, 2016. I hit my bottom after my fourth DWI on December 22, 2015, and discovered the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous shortly thereafter. This program is amazing and has given me a life I once thought to be impossible. I was lucky enough to serve as secretary in my home group until June of 2018. I have a sponsor, and I am blessed to be a sponsor. I am currently making my amends to society in the form of a two-year prison sentence for the DWI."

— **Samantha B., Southwest Region**

"I got sober on August 8, 2014, with the help of my Higher Power and the volunteers who came to visit our group each week. Now

that I'm in another facility, I still work the Steps and go to group every Wednesday. Recently, I was voted in as co-chair by the group. I do my best to talk about my struggles and my battle with alcoholism each day. I tried to read the Big Book, but it was written so long ago that I have trouble picking it up to read. I owe a lot to A.A. and the help it gave me to change my life. I wanted to find a way to give back, and I decided to practice living amends so that people can see that it's possible to get sober and, with hard work on the Steps, to stay sober. I wanted to ask if you could help me with some material as well as a correspondent to help me get a deeper understanding of the Steps so I can share with others around me." —

Art G., Pacific Region

Gratitude for the Hand of A.A.

"Giving thanks. My name is Lamont and I am an alcoholic. I am 64 years of age. I've been in prison for 31 years now. I've been living in recovery for the last 31 years. I just recently graduated from the prison's therapeutic community, this time successfully. I've been in the program twice before, but I was unsuccessful in completion, and I really didn't know why I kept failing. It wasn't until I began to participate in the Alcoholics Anonymous group and found a fellowship of men who had actually experienced what I was missing: strength and hope. They helped me with my problem(s). It was recommended by the drug and alcohol treatment specialist supervisor that I attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and I thank the specialist supervisor for this introduction into my new life, with my new friends. Thank you all so much for helping me." —

Lamont B., North East Region

"I just received the information that I've requested, as well as other things that you thought would be useful. I would really like to thank you and all the men and women behind the scenes helping us who are incarcerated and can't get out on our own. You know, I started drinking when I was 8 years old, and by the time I was 10 years old, I had to have a drink just to focus on getting out of bed and getting dressed. I started drinking to numb the pain from all the physical, emotional and mental pain I was forced to endure. I drank daily for 14 years, until I was arrested and sent to prison. Then I only drank jailhouse hooch. I have been incarcerated for 24 years and I might be getting out soon. I really am only on Step Four. I want to be fully prepared before I get released. Thanks once again for caring." —

Steven I., South East Region

"My name is Lou, and I am serving a 29-year sentence in a state prison in the Midwest. I had been warned about the evils of alcohol since I was young, but to no avail. I had to do it on my own, you know. After a lengthy relationship with alcohol, I came to believe that I might have overestimated my abilities. Through working the Twelve Steps, I came to view things very differently from how I believed them to be: there are so many things I have had to reevaluate in my life — just about everything — and every day I witness miracles happening around me, albeit I still live in prison. To me, the most unsung heroes of our time, without a doubt, are the men and women who go out of their way to come to the state prisons across the country in an attempt to get the

people in those prisons to understand alcoholism and possibly to reevaluate their path. The men I have come across in prisons over the years have profoundly affected my recovery. The sponsor I have through the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) has shared with me his foibles and triumphs within his sobriety. This has been pivotal in my sincere belief that I can live without drinking — and without feeling the awkwardness that I have battled all my life. Thank you to you A.A.s who do what you do without prodding. You help more of us than you know, and I only hope that I can repay my debt by not making any more trips to prison because of my alcoholism, which just adds to the misery.” — James “Lou” L., South West Region

“I am reaching out to you again to see if you can provide me with a correspondence member while I am doing these last 18 months. You provided me with one over two years ago. He had a severe heart attack, and the last time he wrote me he was going to a retirement home. I attempted to write him at that address several times and I received no response. I am sorry to lose this individual as a sponsor; we became good friends through the mail and he always had something positive to say no matter what the circumstances were. He encouraged me to do things I didn’t want to do. I did them, and I succeeded, even receiving my GED. He was the first person that I felt actually cared for me and loved me as he loved everyone. I know his words were true and sincere. I hope you can provide me with another correspondent that is as good as my last.” — Christian A., South East Region

“Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being...”

“My story is a long and rough one, as I am the true definition of an alcoholic. I have been in and out of meetings since the age of 16. I am 32 now. In 2015 I got into meetings and I got a sponsor — a great sponsor. I worked the Steps and got 19 months of sobriety, then fell into a relapse. I was devastated, and I slipped deeper and deeper than I’d ever been. It took 15 months and this incarceration to figure out where I went wrong. I had gone through my inventories and discussed them with my sponsor, and at the end of our talk, he’d asked me if there was anything I was holding back. I said no. Then he said, ‘Is there something that we should really talk about?’ And I said, ‘No, I have been honest.’ But was I? The answer is that I was truthful but not completely honest. I held things back. So, half measures availed me nothing. I could not let go of my deepest and darkest secrets. Now I know that this program works as long as we work it. I have to be rigorously honest. I have to admit to myself, to God and to

another human being the exact nature of my wrongs!” — Joseph C., East Central Region

“I am on Step Five right now. I have an A.A. friend who comes to the prison to lead A.A. groups. He has taken time out of his day to come up here and complete Step Five with me. Progress is in the making. I’m not sure if I am requesting too much, but I will accept all that is available. I am sharing all the help and knowledge that I am receiving from A.A. and I’m trying to reach out to others who are in need of the push to pursue sobriety!” — Michael M., South West Region

“My name is Matthew. I am 48 years old and have been incarcerated for nearly 20 years. I am almost three years sober. My sobriety date is December 25. I am currently the vice chair here for the Thursday night A.A. meeting. I am getting ready to work Steps Four and Five, and I’m not really sure how to do that through the mail — unless my sponsor is a lawyer! — but I’m willing to do what I can. Even if all I have is a member who can just guide me through the Steps, I would be grateful. I don’t know exactly what your group has to offer, but I’m interested in finding out. I’m ready for real change, and I have a very strong desire to stay sober, and I’m willing to work the Steps. In January I will be attending college for the spring semester. I am working toward a degree in human services so that I can someday help others, and hopefully prevent others from going down the road that I went down.” — Matthew W., Pacific Region

Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.)

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have at least six more months to serve. We randomly match an outside A.A. from another region, with men writing to men and women writing to women. We do not provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers or court officials. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you make contact, an outside A.A. member may be willing to sponsor you. If you have an interest in sharing about your experiences as they relate to sobriety and problems with alcohol, then please write and request a form. We appreciate your patience.

Prerelease Contact

This service is for incarcerated alcoholics who have a release date scheduled three to six months away. We do not assign sponsors; however, once you have transitioned from “inside” A.A. to “outside” A.A., someone may be willing to sponsor you. We try to arrange for an outside A.A. in your home community to temporarily write to you just prior to your release. You can request a form, or write to us, providing your release date and destination (address, city, state, phone number).